

Monkeypox infection

Information for patients who have been tested for Monkeypox or have had a positive test



More information is available from the following websites:

- NHS Inform - www.nhsinform.scot
- Terrence Higgins Trust - www.tht.org.uk/news/monkeypox-uk
- i-base – <https://i-base.info/htb/43267>

What is Monkeypox?

Monkeypox is a viral infection. It is related to Smallpox but is not as severe. In the past, infections were seen in central or west Africa and only occasionally in the UK, usually in people who had travelled to Africa.

What illness does it cause?

Monkeypox is usually a mild self-limiting illness. If you're infected with Monkeypox, symptoms usually start 5 to 21 days later. The symptoms nearly always get better by themselves over 2 to 4 weeks.

Symptoms of Monkeypox can include:

- High temperature (fever)
- Headache
- Flu-like symptoms, including muscle and back ache, shivering and tiredness
- Swollen glands that feel like new lumps (in the neck, armpits or groin)
- Inflammation of the rectum (pain and discharge from the anus – called proctitis)
- A blistering rash that usually starts 1 to 5 days after other symptoms – the rash may start on the face or in the genital area and may spread to other parts of the body. The rash (pox) usually goes through stages before getting better: flat spots, raised spot and then blisters which heal by scabbing over.

Why is it affecting those who are gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (GBMSM)?

There have recently been a much larger number of Monkeypox infections than usual across Europe and the UK has had one of the largest outbreaks. Most but not all of these cases are in GBMSM who have no link to Africa. Most of the cases seen in Scotland are in GBMSM.

It seems that the current outbreak is linked to GBMSM networks (socialising, apps, dating, etc) and means that infections are currently higher in this group, even though not all cases are passed on through sex. Having a higher number of sex partners, sex at sex parties, sex-on-premises venues (saunas) or in darkrooms and cruising grounds seems to carry a higher risk of Monkeypox.

How is Monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox does not spread very easily between people. However, you can catch Monkeypox from close contact with an infected person with Monkeypox through:

- Touching blisters or scabs and having any skin to skin contact (including sexual contact)
- Touching clothes, bedding, towels or personal items used by a person who has a Monkeypox rash, blisters or scabs
- Coughs or sneezes from a person with Monkeypox.

How serious is it?

Monkeypox is usually a mild and self limiting illness but can rarely cause severe illness. Most previous cases have been seen in Africa, where more people were at risk of severe disease and treatments were not available. The current cases in GBMSM in the UK are a milder strain or 'clade' of the Monkeypox virus. There have been very few cases of serious illness in the current outbreak and very rare deaths in most countries, even where case numbers are high.

Am I more at risk of serious disease if I get Monkeypox?

People who may be more at risk of serious disease include children, pregnant people and people who have low immunity (immunosuppressed).

Does it affect people with HIV differently?

About 40% of all Monkeypox cases in Europe are in people living with HIV and, as noted above, there have been few cases of serious illness in the current outbreak and very few deaths. The current advice is that treatment and care should be the same as for people who are HIV negative.

Most people living with HIV in the UK are on treatment and well. We think that the risk of severe illness might be greater for people with a CD4 count of less than 200, a recent HIV related illness, or a viral load over 200 copies/mL. The British HIV Association has released a statement on HIV and Monkeypox:

www.bhiva.org/BHIVA-rapid-statement-on-monkeypox-virus

Treating Monkeypox

Monkeypox is usually a mild and self limiting illness and most people recover by themselves in 2 to 4 weeks. However, in some cases if a person is really unwell, they may need hospital treatment in a specialist unit. If you are being tested for Monkeypox or there is a possibility you may have Monkeypox, we recommend:

- Get plenty of rest and don't exert yourself physically
- If you have a fever:
 - Don't over dress. Wear loose comfortable clothing and make sure the room you are in isn't too warm. You shouldn't attempt to make yourself feel cold. Drink more fluids, avoiding alcohol as this can make dehydration worse. You sweat more when you have a fever and drinking water makes sure you won't get dehydrated. You should be passing urine approximately every 6 hours. Pale yellow urine means you're unlikely to be dehydrated.
- If you have a fever or pain:
 - Take a medicine that reduces fever such as paracetamol (unless you're allergic or have been told by a healthcare professional that you can't take it).

I have had a test for Monkeypox, when will I get my result?

If you have been tested for Monkeypox you should usually get the result within 2 working days (e.g. tested Friday, results on Monday; or tested Tuesday, results on Thursday). While you are waiting for your result you should self isolate.

What should I do if my Monkeypox test result is positive?

You should continue to practise the self care measures described above. If you feel unwell, you can discuss this at any point with our team, including when you have the test, receive the result or during follow-up. We can then decide whether you need to come to hospital for further monitoring or treatment.

Otherwise, you should self isolate at home until:

- You have not had a high temperature for at least 72 hours
- You have had no new blisters in the previous 48 hours
- All your blisters have scabbed over
- You have no blisters or ulcers left remaining in your mouth
- Any blisters on the exposed areas of the body (your face, arms and hands) have scabbed over, all the scabs have fallen off and a fresh layer of skin has formed underneath.

Self isolation advice

You can find advice on how to self-isolate safely at home on NHS inform (website below).

Staying at home alone for a period of time can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people. Waverley Care offer one to one mental health and wellbeing support to people with Monkeypox who are isolating, via video or phone calls. If you would like this support please fill in the 'Looking for support' online form available at: <https://s-x.scot/about-sx>

More advice on supporting your mental wellbeing is available on NHS Inform (website below).

I have Monkeypox will I get any medical follow up?

The doctor or nurse who contacts you with your Monkeypox result will assess your symptoms. They will then tell you what follow up you may need. Follow up appointments will usually be by phone.

When can I have any sex again?

While you're self-isolating, you should refrain from sexual activity or any close contact with other people.

Because it's not known how long Monkeypox virus remains present in semen and other genital fluid after infection, we recommend that you use condoms for a further 12 weeks after the period of self isolation has ended. This is a precaution to reduce the risk of spreading infection to your partner.

What if I am feeling more unwell?

If your symptoms are worsening, you can contact Chalmers centre Monday – Friday 9am-4pm. If you need advice out with these hours call 111. In an emergency please phone 999.

Resources

- NHS Inform: www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/monkeypox/
- Waverley care: www.waverleycare.org/support-and-advice/service-areas/edinburgh-sexual-health-services
- Mental Wellbeing: www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing

